

Relief operations in western Mosul reaching 'breaking point' as civilians flee hunger, fighting – UN

16 March 2017 – The United Nations and its humanitarian partners in Iraq are scrambling to get emergency sites ready amidst a mass exodus from West Mosul, with nearly 700,000 civilians still living in the city where Iraqi forces are fighting the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh), according to the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in the country.

“The number of people is higher than expected,” Lise Grande told journalist in New York via videoconference from Iraq. “If the pace accelerates further, it’s going to stretch us to the breaking point.”

She added that if 50,000 civilians flee in a single day, the current system would not work properly. The UN and its partners have already started to set up large warehouse size structures which will house the families as they await “the dignified support they deserve,” said Ms. Grande.

According to the latest figures she disclosed, there are still an estimated 650,000 to 680,000 civilians in Mosul’s Old City.

“We fear the civilians there might be trapped in an extremely difficult situation. Families that chose to stay are at risk, families that leave are also at risk,” said Ms. Grande, noting that ISIL is targeting people who try to flee what is expected to be a prolonged siege.

Meanwhile, people who stay are without food and water. No steady supplies have been able to reach the city since mid-November, Ms. Grande said.



Iraqi women and children displaced from the Mosul corridor line up to receive food in Debaga Displacement Camp in Erbil Governorate. Photo: UNICEF/Anmar

Families with resources are trying to trade what they can to eat even one meal a day, according to stories from people who were able to flee, while some people go for days without meals.

“Whether you stay or whether you go there are significant risks to the civilians,” Ms. Grande noted. “The greatest problem is water.”

When the military operation to oust terrorists from the area began on 17 October 2016, some 1.5 million civilians were living in Mosul. In the eastern part of the city, some 345,000 were displaced – of whom about 70,000 returned home because “conditions are ready and safe to do so,” journalists were told today.

The western part of Mosul is more densely populated, however. There is hope that civilian casualties will be limited because the Iraqi forces adopted a so-called “humanitarian concept of operations” which prohibits artillery strikes, requires civilians to remain in their homes, and provides humanitarian exit corridors wherever necessary.

Those who do flee are screened at the Hammam al Alil site, with the men separated from the women and children. Once interrogated and cleared, the families are reunited.

The senior UN official said the Organization and its humanitarian partners are working “around the clock” in support of the Iraqi Government to quickly get sites ready for the displaced civilians. Aid workers receive the site, set up tents and mattresses, clear and construct sanitation areas, and then transfer the areas to Iraqi military, who move in civilians on civilian buses.

Ms. Grande said that there are concerns about water and sanitation at the screening sites, and that the Government has asked for additional support to help it correct those conditions.

The UN and its partners are supplying food, water and other services to the sites, with more than 1.4 million people reached.

Coordination between the UN, its partners and the Government is good, but “complicated,” Ms. Grande acknowledged, noting that the UN is part of 19 daily coordination forums, which include a range from local to national officials.

Speech: “We have to take action whenever a weapon of mass destruction is used.”

Let me begin by welcoming you Sacha to the Council for the first time in your role as Chair of the Committee and thank you for your briefing.

I’d also like to thank Council members for their remarks today. Today you have all shown this Council’s unity and determination to prevent biological, chemical and nuclear material falling into the hands of terrorists and other non-state actors.

Sadly, on this Council we know only too well that that is no longer a hypothetical threat. The nightmare scenario has been seen in too many places. In Iraq, where we have seen worrying, persistent reports of terrorists using chemical weapons. In Syria, where the UN mandated investigation has proven

that chemical weapons have been used both by Daesh and by the Asad regime. And now in Malaysia, where we were all shocked by reports that VX was used to kill Kim Jong Nam.

As these events prove, proliferation threats do not stand still, they are constantly evolving, and we must remain alert to new trends. We will have to be adaptable and nimble to keep our citizens safe.

Ensuring that states have the means and resources at their disposal to deal with these threats is the foundation of Resolution 1540. It sets out how we can make ourselves more secure; by ensuring that our legislation limits the ability to develop such weapons; by having the right controls in place to safeguard potentially hazardous material and by hardening our borders to stop their spread.

This is collective security. One state's resilience can prevent the spread of a threat to others. But just as one state can help our collective security, so too can one state undermine it.

The current implementation rate of 1540 measures worldwide is 48%. We must continue to work towards full, universal fulfilment of these obligations.

In 2017 we should maintain the momentum and energy from the Comprehensive Review, and ensure that we effectively implement the taskings from Resolution 2325.

We should stay abreast of advances in science and technology that may increase the proliferation risk, but may also present us with opportunities to tackle the threats better. For instance, through advances in cyber, 3D printing and drones.

This Council broke new ground last year by calling on the States to adopt effective national control lists for sensitive materials – a vital step in an effective non-proliferation regime. We should work collaboratively with those who have already developed effective national control lists, and support those who are just starting out.

We should continue to offer assistance and technical support to those who need it to implement 1540 fully. Better matching of requests for assistance to those who require it should follow a more regional approach, as agreed by the Council last year.

But in truth, such preventative measures will count for little if there is continued impunity for those who use biological, chemical or nuclear material as weapons. It isn't enough just to condemn. We have to take action whenever a weapon of mass destruction is used, and we would make sure that there are meaningful consequences for the state actors and non-state actors alike.

Last month, in response to the findings of the Joint Investigative Mechanism, I regret that a minority of Council members blocked a resolution which would have imposed measures responding to atrocities committed in Syria. We must draw on the unity we show on 1540 to find the consensus needed to act against the use of such weapons.

In conclusion, it's clear that the 1540 Committee has a huge task ahead. And Sacha, you have the full support of the United Kingdom in making as much progress as you can.

Thank you.

[Julie Cooper reponds to 20p increase in prescription charges](#)

Julie Cooper MP, Labour's Shadow Health Minister for Care in the Community, commenting on the 20p increase in prescription charges, said:

"It is disappointing to see the Government increasing prescription charges. While 20p may not seem a lot it will impact on those people who are already struggling with the rising cost of living. At the same time the Government is also increasing patient charges for NHS dental care, as well as raising charges for wigs and fabric supports.

"The rise in prescription charges is a reflection of this Government's financial mismanagement of the National Health Service. At a time when the cost of living continues to rise the Government ought to be doing much more to help people with the cost of healthcare."

[We don't need another divisive referendum – Kez](#)

Commenting on the Prime Minister's remarks about any future referendum on Scotland leaving the UK, **Scottish Labour leader Kezia Dugdale** said:

"Scottish Labour will vote against Nicola Sturgeon's demands for a second referendum on Scotland leaving the UK. Our country is divided enough – we don't need another divisive referendum.

"We need the SNP government to get on with the day job. That means focusing on jobs, growing the economy and helping family incomes.

“Scottish Labour believes that together we’re stronger, and the Labour Party I lead will never support leaving the UK.

“Holding another referendum on leaving the UK is the wrong thing to do for Scotland’s economy, especially when there is so much economic uncertainty from the Tories’ reckless and complacent plans for a hard Brexit.

“We should not forget that we are only in this position because of the Tories’ reckless Brexit gamble.

“There absolutely should not be another independence referendum until after Brexit. We have no idea what Brexit looks like, or how it will impact our economy and families in Scotland. People cannot be asked to make a decision about the future of our 300-year old Union in the dark. If there is to be another vote the people of Scotland deserve clarity on what they are being asked to vote on.

“Nicola Sturgeon should stop trying to pretend that if Scotland leaves the UK we would remain in the EU. It is clear that a separate Scotland would need to reapply for EU membership from scratch, regardless of the Brexit process.

“If after Brexit we have that clarity and the people of Scotland want a referendum on leaving the UK then it isn’t the job of the UK government to stand in the way of that. But if there has to be another referendum it cannot be a stitch up by either Nicola Sturgeon or Theresa May.”

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[Tory disarray: a government agenda unravelling](#)

Andrew

Gwynne MP, Labour’s Campaigns and Elections Chair, commenting on the unravelling of the Tory Budget, said:

“The Tories are in a mess, riven by infighting and failure and disarray.

“They have embarrassed themselves over the Budget, they still have no answers on Brexit and they’re fighting between themselves rather than fixing the problems.

“Theresa May says she has a plan and is sticking to it, but almost every day we see

another promise broken or another change of heart. Flagship policies are being delayed or abandoned altogether while working people across this country bear the brunt of the Tories' incompetence.

"It is now clearer than ever that Theresa May cannot give Britain the change we need. Working people deserve better than Tory failure – only a Labour Government will stand up for them and their families."

Ends